



Georgia Department of Agriculture
Tommy Irvin, Commissioner
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Atlanta, GA 30334

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Turn them in to prevent risk of monkeypox

Prairie Dogs, Gambian Rats Are Illegal And Possibly Dangerous, Ag Chief Warns

ATLANTA – Commissioner of Agriculture Tommy Irvin reminded citizens today that prairie dogs and Gambian rats are illegal to keep as pets in Georgia. Commissioner Irvin's announcement came as concerns grew over the outbreak of monkeypox in the United States. The outbreak has been traced to these animals.

"The Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has long had a ban on these animals. As part of our job regulating the animal industry in Georgia, Department of Agriculture personnel have always been on the lookout for prairie dogs and other illegal animals as part of their regular duties," said Irvin. "The new federal ban on the importation of Gambian rats and other African rodents and the ban on the sale of prairie dogs reinforce what we have already been doing in Georgia.

"The disease linked to these animals is a warning that keeping illegal animals can be dangerous to the owners, the community and the environment. Monkeypox virus has infected people in several states. It has the potential of infecting native wildlife as well, damaging wildlife populations and further spreading the disease to humans and domestic animals," said Irvin.

The DNR Wildlife Resources Division (WRD) is encouraging people currently holding illegal animals to turn them over to proper authorities. "Responsible individuals no longer wishing to harbor an illegally possessed prairie dog or Gambian rat should

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contact any WRD office to initiate the transfer of the unwanted and potentially dangerous wild animal,” said WRD Assistant Chief of Game Management Dan Forster. “Under no circumstances should wild animal pets be simply turned loose.”

For those persons apprehensive about admitting possession of an illegal prairie dog or Gambian rat, Forster emphasized that “the Division is far more interested in bringing individuals into compliance with existing laws and regulations as a means to protect Georgia citizens and the integrity of our native wildlife than an aggressive pursuit of a citation for illegal possession of one of these wild animals.”

Persons should seek immediate guidance from the Georgia Department of Human Resources Division of Public Health if there is concern about contact with an exotic rodent or prairie dog acquired as a pet after April 15th of this year. Any potential exposure to monkeypox from these rodents should be evaluated since possible vaccination and treatment may be recommended. Additional information about monkeypox in humans can be found at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/monkeypox/index.htm> .

To report possession of one of these animals, contact the WRD Special Permits Office at 770-761-3044. To report possession of one of these animals in the pet trade, contact the Georgia Department of Agriculture at 1-800-282-5852. To report potential human exposure to monkeypox, contact the Georgia Division of Public Health at 404 657-2588.

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